**SUMMARY**

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*In the Footsteps of Śaṅkara: Topographies in Local Hagiographies and Advaita Vedānta Monastic Tradition in Kerala*

Doctoral dissertation concerns the hitherto unstudied vernacular hagiographic tradition of Śaṅkara (*ca*. 788-820) - the great Indian philosopher and founder of the pan-Indian monastic order within the Advaita Vedānta doctrine - in Kerala (South India). This literary tradition is represented by a series of the lesser-known texts in Sanskrit and Malayalam. The sacred topography created through the hagiographic narrative causes the overlap of spatial religious concepts and physical geography of temples, monasteries and pilgrimage sites.

The vernacular literary practice contrasts with the broadly known pan-Indian, canonical hagiographic tradition of Śaṅkara which relates that during the conquest of the quarters, philosopher reached four corners of the Indian Peninsula where he established four monastic centers (Skr. *maṭha – “*monastery*”*) to propagate the Advaita Vedānta doctrine. These were Govardhana (in the East), Śārada (in the South), Dvāraka (in the West) and Jyotirmaṭha Pīṭha (in the North). Whereas, according to the local accounts from Kerala, Śaṅkara is believed to establish all four monasteries in one city only – *i.e*. in Tṛśśūr located in central Kerala. Established institutions were said to be: Northern Monastery (Mal. Vaṭakke Maṭham), Middle Monastery (Mal. Naṭuvil Maṭham), In-between Monastery (Mal. Iṭayil Maṭham) and Southern Monastery (Mal. Tekkē Maṭham). Subsequently, according to the local hagiographic tradition, philosopher is believed to achieve *videhamukti* (liberation after death) in the Śaiva Vaṭakkunnāthan temple located nearby the four Tṛśśūr monasteries. As the heads of the Keralan monastic institutions Śaṅkara is said to have appointed his four main disciples - Sureśvara, Padmapāda, Hastāmalaka, Toṭaka - who afterwards allegedly passed *maṭha*s in charge of the community of the Nampūtiri brahmins. Three monasteries survived in Tṛśśūr till today - Naṭuvil and Tekkē Maṭham remain active monastic centres, while Vaṭakke Maṭham has been transformed into school where *Veda*s are taught in traditional manner (Skr. *vedapāṭhaśālā*). Iṭayil Maṭham is said to have been relocated to other district. Keralan *maṭha*s constitute an independent vernacular variant of the Advaita Vedānta monasticism.

The primary objective of the thesis was to examine the processes of the geospace fabularization, cultural and literary methods of space valorization and an issue of a creation of sacred topographies by the vernacular hagiographic narratives. For this purpose the most suitable perspective appeared to be the category of a map and literary mapping. Application of the historical contextualization and literary geography methods during the analysis allowed to trace the process of *production of places*[[1]](#footnote-1)based on the case study *– i.e.* the Advaita Vedānta monastic institutions in Kerala. Through the geographical contextualization in the historic perspective I aimed to shed light on the nature of interconnections between the local hagiographic tradition and the Advaita Vedānta monasticism in Kerala.

The dissertation is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter after detailed presentation of the sources used in the dissertation, I expand on the methodology applied in the thesis *i.e.* philological method, contextualization, and approach influenced by the literary cartography which assumes that the act of writing *per se* and creating geospatial descriptions in literature can be perceived as an act of mapping and cartographic activity. A writer, like a cartographer, designs a spatial arrangement of a territory by accepting an appropriate scale, making a specific selection of location, stressing the significance of a specific topographic points – thus writer creates a narrative map. The narrative maps primarily influence the mental maps of the readers. They cause the neutral places and spaces to become significant topographic points, recognizable from literature[[2]](#footnote-2).

In the second chapter, in order to explain the socio-historical context in which emerged the vernacular Advaita Vedānta hagiographic practice in Kerala, I sketch a preliminary reconstruction of the Nampūtiri Advaita Vedānta monasticism’s micro-history. The analysis of the historical sources seems to indicate that the Nampūtiri Advaita Vedānta monasticism in Kerala probably traces its origin not to the figure of famous philosopher Śaṅkara but to the local institution of the temple *saṃnyāsin*, referred to in the medieval epigraphs by the honorific title *bhaṭāra-tiruvaṭi* or *paḻāra-tiruvaṭi.* The person on this post was presumably, to some extent, in charge of the temple management and was imposed with some ritual obligations. The inscriptional evidence suggests that thebrahmins who held the office of temple *saṃnyāsin*shave been persons of some consequence and high social standing. The institution of the *bhaṭāra-tiruvaṭi / paḻāra- tiruvaṭi* in Kerala is recorded in the inscriptions and temple chronicles from the period between *ca*. 11th - 16th century. In the course of time, the institutional character of *bhaṭāra-tiruvaṭi / paḻāra- tiruvaṭi* office seems to have evolved and go through a process of transformation. It seems that the *maṭha*s, that once have been residences of the attached to particular temples *bhaṭāra-tiruvaṭis / paḻāra- tiruvaṭis*, started to turn into more independent – separate from the temple – monastic centres. Thus, it seems possible that in response to the developments taking place in the region, the temple *saṃnyāsin*s needed a new historical identity that would lend a legitimacy to their socio-religious institution. These particular circumstances might have resulted in adopting the Advaita Vedānta affiliation and emergence of the vernacular hagiographic practice in Kerala that evoked the figure of Śaṅkara and linked him with the Nampūtiri *maṭha*s.

In the third chapter I discuss in detail each of the hagiographies belonging to the examined vernacular literary practice *i.e.* *Śaṅkarācāryacarita* by Govindanātha*, Padmapādācāryacarita, Bhagavatpādamahimānuvarṇana* by Bālagopālayatīndra*,* B-0059 (184) *Śaṅkarācāryacaritam, Divākaracarita, Śaṅkarabrahmānandavilāsam* by Ālattūr Anujan Nampūtirippāṭu˘,and *Kūṣmāṇḍaśaṅkaravijaya* by Puruṣottama Bhāratī*.* In this section of the dissertation I deal at length with *inter alia* texts’ authorship, dating, manuscripts, published editions and translations. The available manuscript material seems to show that the manuscripts of the texts belonging to the local hagiographic practice were produced in particular in the 19th century. Moreover, the majority of the said manuscripts was written down in the Malayalam script what implies that most probably their circulation must have been limited to the region of Kerala. Worth of attention appears to be also the manuscripts’ provenance. The colophons prove that the major part of the preserved manuscripts belonged to the Nampūtiri brahmins who were settled in central Kerala. Hence, the source of the manuscripts in question seems to confirm the hermetic character of the vernacular Advaita Vedānta monastic tradition that was confined to the Nampūtiri community. The manuscripts’ provenance may also indicate the presumable geographic location of emergence of the discussed vernacular Advaita Vedānta hagiographic practice – *i.e.* central Kerala.

In the fourth chapter I examine the literary cartographies charted by the Keralan hagiographic narratives. I translate and analyze selected passages from particular vernacular hagiographies that feature protagonists’ wanderings across the region of Kerala and refer to specific geographic locations and local sacred sites*.* In this chapter I aim to demonstrate how local authors had located the regional Nampūtiri Advaita Vedānta monasticism on their narrative maps of Kerala and hence created a conceptual map of the local Śaṅkaric tradition. The vernacular hagiographers charted elaborate literary microcartographies in their works. The focus of all examined narratives is located on the microlevel - in the geospace of Kerala. The authors featured in their works places crucial for the local Nampūtiri Advaita Vedānta monasticism, gave them shape and meaning, and wove those sites together into a narrative map. Thereby, they made the connection visible. The map of the vernacular Śaṅkaric tradition, charted by the hagiographic narrative, might have served the readers as a navigating tool through the intricate network of interconnected institutions. It seems that most probably the vernacular Advaita Vedānta hagiographic practice was purposed to lend the Nampūtiri monastic institutions a spatial legitimation.

In the conclusion of the dissertation, I bring together all issues discussed in the thesis and present findings that follow from the previous chapters’ analysis. There are two annexes attached to the dissertation. The first one comprises a transcription of the Malayalam text of *Śaṅkarācāryacaritam* from the palm leaf manuscript B-0059 (184) that is presently stored in the manuscript library of the Vaṭakke Maṭham Brahmasvam Vedic Research Center in Tṛśśūr. The second one contains a transcript of the interview with Naṭuvil Maṭham Svāmiyār – Maṟavañcēri Tekkēṭattu˘ Nīlakaṇṭhan Bhāratīkaḷ – that I conducted on 03.10.2016 in Mitrānandapuram Naṭuvil Maṭham in Tiruvanantapuram.

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1. B. Piatti, L. Hurni, *Editorial. Cartographies of Fictional Worlds*, „The Cartographic Journal”, vol. 48 (no. 4), 2011, p. 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. E. Rybicka, *Geopoetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich*, Kraków 2014, pp. 152-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)